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The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P., Prime Minister of Canada, Ottawa

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing on an urgent issue that is important to us as a women's rights organization. Poland's government has come under international scrutiny and condemnation for threatening and violating the human rights of women, LGBTQIA2S+ individuals and minoritised ethnic persons in that country.

In 2019, the UN identified the increase in racist and xenophobic "hate crimes and the use of hate speech and incitement to hatred within the political framework in Poland."<sup>1</sup>

In 2020, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, in a memorandum on the stigmatization of LGBTQIA2S+ persons in Poland, identified:

- "Anti-LGBT declarations" and "Family Charters" in ninety-four local government entities;
- Stigmatization by government officials;
- Government funded homophobia;
- Anti-LGBTQIA2S+ litigation and prosecution.<sup>2</sup>

In January 2021, Poland's government put a near-total abortion ban into effect, after the country's controversial constitutional court, viewed by critics as politically subordinated to the ruling Law and Justice party, struck down terminations for severe foetal impairment, which had comprised 98% of legal abortions in Poland.<sup>3</sup>

On March 30 2021, Bill 915 went to a vote in the lower house of the Polish parliament where it was approved by 250 out of 448 Members of Parliament.<sup>4</sup> Bill 915 is part of the initiative "Tak Dla Rodziny, Nie Dla Gender," which translates to "Yes to Family, No to Gender." Bill 915 was introduced to replace the Istanbul Convention, also known as the Council of Europe Convention Preventing and Combating Violence against Women, which Poland ratified in 2015.<sup>5</sup> It has been drafted by Ordo Iuris Institute, an "extremist religious organization"<sup>6</sup> and "anti-human rights lobbying" group "that opposes abortion in all cases, same-sex marriage and civil partnerships, and sexual education."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Human Rights Officer of the High Commissioner. "Committee on Racial Discrimination examines report of Poland." <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24876&LangID=E>

<sup>2</sup> Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. CommDH(2020)27 Original version Memorandum on the stigmatisation of LGBTI people in Poland. <https://rm.coe.int/memorandum-on-the-stigmatisation-of-lgbti-people-in-poland/1680a08b8e>

<sup>3</sup> Priooncuk, Monika, Kwai, I and Anatol Magdziarz. "Declaration of War": Protesters in Poland Vow to Fight Abortion Ban." The New York Times. 28 Jan 2021. <https://nyti.ms/2M1juq9>

<sup>4</sup> Głosowanie nr 89 na 27. Posiedzeniu Sejmu. Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. 30 March 2021.

<https://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/agent.xsp?symbol=glosowania&NrKadencji=9&NrPosiedzenia=27&NrGlosowania=89>

<sup>5</sup> Chart of Signatures and ratifications of Treaty 210. Council of Europe. 05 March 2021.

[https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210/signatures?p\\_auth=DWgltLKj](https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210/signatures?p_auth=DWgltLKj)

<sup>6</sup> Foundation Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture - EPF Intelligence Briefing. European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual & Reproductive Rights. 24 April 2021. <https://www.epfweb.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/EPF%20Ordo%20Iuris%20-%20EPF%20Intelligence%20brief.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Ordo Iuris. European Humanist Federation. <https://humanistfederation.eu/radical-religious-lobbies/ordo-iuris/>



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On March 31 2021, the European Commission referred Poland to the European Court of Justice for ongoing violations of Rule of Law, and erosion of judiciary independence, requesting that interim measures be taken to safeguard the courts.<sup>8</sup>

The abortion ban and proposed 'Family Charter' legislation are draconian assaults on women's and LGBTQIA2S+ persons' health and safety and a violation of their sexual and reproductive rights. It will lead to further violations of rights protected under international human rights law, including the rights to the highest attainable standards of health, as well as to freedom from torture, punishment and inhuman or degrading treatment.

Mass protests have erupted in Poland against the abortion ban and ongoing threats against LGBTQIA2S+ people, calling for democracy, inclusive governance, equality, diversity and respect for human rights. Over 450,000 people were estimated to take part in the Strajk Kobiet 'Women's Strike' demonstrations on the first day alone, and protests have continued daily since the Constitutional Tribunal's ruling in October. Police have arrested and used excessive force against peaceful protesters, including teenage girls, older adults, journalists and even a Member of Parliament. The methods have included physical force (leading to broken bones), using tear gas, pepper spray, metal batons, unlawful detainment, unconstitutional arrests and public shaming of opposition voices. One of the leaders of the Strajk Kobiet movement has been arrested and faces 8 years in jail for allegedly "insulting a police officer and causing an epidemiological threat for organizing protests during the coronavirus pandemic."<sup>9</sup> All this is taking place during a deadly pandemic.

Canada has been a consistently strong voice for the protection and the advancement of human rights. The central elements of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) are "gender equality" and the "empowerment of women". "Human dignity" and "inclusive governance" are also strategic areas. The policy promotes "fundamental human rights, regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability or any other aspect of identity."<sup>10</sup> In 2017, when Canada announced the FIAP, the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time said, "Women's rights are human rights. This includes sexual and reproductive rights—and the right to access safe and legal abortions. These rights are at the core of our foreign policy."<sup>11</sup>

Earlier this year, 751 Canadians signed a petition to the House of Commons, asking the Government of Canada to urgently:

1. Condemn stigmatization, violence and prosecution against women, ethnic minorities, and LGBTQIA2S+ persons in Poland;

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<sup>8</sup> Rule of Law: European Commission refers Poland to the European Court of Justice to protect independence of Polish judges and asks for interim measures. European Commission. 31 March 2021.  
[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_1524](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_1524)

<sup>9</sup> Gera, Vanessa. "Women's rights activist charged for role in Polish Protests." AP News. 11 February 2021. <https://bit.ly/2ZsQafm>

<sup>10</sup> Government of Canada, "Feminist International Assistance Policy," Government of Canada, Ottawa, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2ZqW40j> (accessed September 17, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Government of Canada, "Feminist International Assistance Policy,"



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2. Raise the matter of human rights in Poland at the ministerial level;
3. Call on Poland's government to uphold its obligations under international human rights law and conventions;
4. Engage bilaterally and multilaterally, including through the Equal Rights Coalition, to protect human rights in Poland; and,
5. Support civil-society groups defending human rights in Poland, including through Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy.<sup>12</sup>

Over 2000 persons from across Canada have already signed the Change.org petition to address the human rights violations against Women and LGBTQIA2S+ persons in Poland.<sup>13</sup>

We ask that you, as Members of Parliament and leaders in feminist issues, to formally raise the issue of, and advocate for, the human rights of women, LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, and minoritised ethnic persons in Poland with the Government of Canada calling for urgent action to further support, advance, and protect human rights in Poland.

Please also consider other ways that you can help, including:

1. Making a statement in the House of Commons in support of the human rights of women, LGBTQIA2S+ individuals and minoritised ethnic persons in Poland;
2. Issuing a statement on social media in support of the human rights of women, LGBTQIA2S+ individuals and minoritised ethnic persons in Poland;
3. Raising the issue of, and advocating for, the human rights of women, LGBTQIA2S+ individuals and minoritised ethnic persons in Poland with the relevant chair of your caucus on these issues.

We are counting on you to represent our concerns - as well as the concerns of many other Canadians - about the threats to, and the violations of, human rights in Poland. Please stand with us Canadians, and please stand with the women, LGBTQIA2S+ individuals and minoritised ethnic persons in Poland.

Sincerely,

The Institute for International Women's Rights – Manitoba in solidarity with Polonia Inclusive

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<sup>12</sup> Petition: e-3177, House of Commons. <https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-3177> 12. Petition: Canada needs to condemn Poland for Human Rights Violations against Women and LGTBQ+. Change Org. <http://chnng.it/yYhjmcycXh>

<sup>13</sup> Petition: e-3177, House of Commons.